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# Gluten-Free Diet In Pregnancy Could Help Prevent Type 1 Diabetes In Children

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It has been estimated that around 400,000 people in the UK live with type 1 diabetes – and almost 30,000 of these are children. It is a problem that is only going to get bigger, with the incidence of type 1 diabetes in children increasing steadily year on year. In fact, the UK has the world's fifth highest rate of diagnosis of type 1 diabetes in children aged up to 14, according to an international league table compiled by Diabetes UK.

As I mentioned in an earlier [blog post](#), several environmental risk factors could be involved in type 1 diabetes, in addition to a genetic cause. One of these is the early introduction of gluten-containing foods, such as bread or rusks, into an infant's diet. Studies carried out at the University of Copenhagen over the last 15 years have investigated the role of gluten, a protein found in grains such as wheat, barley and rye, in the development of type 1 diabetes. Their latest findings, which have just been published, suggest that mothers who follow a gluten-free diet during pregnancy and breast feeding could help to protect their children from developing the condition<sup>1</sup>.

The study was carried out using a strain of mice that has been specially bred to have a high susceptibility to type 1 diabetes and to provide a model of the condition in humans. The researchers found that when mouse mothers were given a gluten-free diet from the start of pregnancy until the end of lactation, it had a protective effect against type 1 diabetes in the pups. In this strain of mice, the onset of type 1 diabetes usually occurs when they are around three months old. However, the offspring of mothers who were fed a gluten-free diet did not develop the condition, even though the pups themselves were weaned onto a normal diet containing gluten.

The researchers point out that, although the results of animal research don't always apply to humans, studies have found that a gluten-free diet has some benefits in children with type 1 diabetes. There are even case reports of children diagnosed as having type 1 diabetes being put onto a gluten-free diet and appearing to have total remission from the disease, in terms of normal blood sugar levels, without the need for insulin therapy<sup>2</sup>.

If you are a woman who has type 1 diabetes, or a family history of the disease, and you are planning on becoming pregnant, it would be prudent to follow a gluten-free diet. Children with type 1 diabetes may also benefit from cutting out gluten.

## **How to cut gluten out of your diet**

Avoiding gluten can be tricky, since it is in so much of the food that is generally available. However, if you are following a low GL, wholefood diet, you are already halfway there! Here are a few tips for embarking on a gluten-free regime:

- Gluten is present in wheat, rye and barley, so you will have to avoid any products containing these grains. These include most processed foods.
- Beer, lager and barley water squashes also need to be avoided, as they are made from gluten grains.
- Oats do not contain gluten but may be contaminated with it (because the same milling machinery is used for other grains), unless they are marked as being gluten-free.
- Rice, quinoa, buckwheat and other grains are generally gluten-free. But remember to use them cautiously if you are also following a low GL diet for blood sugar control.
- Breakfasts can be tricky since toast and most commercial cereals are out – but never be tempted to skip this important meal. Be inventive with eggs or make up your own low GL, gluten-free muesli.
- If you work away from home during the day, you will probably need to take your own gluten-free lunch with you, unless you can buy healthy, gluten-free food options locally.

- If you suffer from diabetes, the possibility of having to undergo an amputation as a result of diabetic neuropathy will never be far from your mind. But did you know that a simple foot patch that you can use at home could give you an early indication of nerve damage that could well prevent such a drastic outcome? I shall be giving you details of this device, which was recently tested on more than 1000 patients, in my next blog post.

**Wishing you the best of health,**

**Martin Hum**  
**PhD DHD Nutritionist**  
**for Real Diabetes Truth**



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## References

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